



Positioning Immigrants as Assets: GUIDELINES

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Getting Started

1

What are the immigrant-owned businesses in the neighborhood or science/technology categories (if any) in your area? What are the often hidden growing businesses in transportation, food and building services?

2

If you don't know what immigrant-owned businesses there are, look for community partners for information (police, fire and health departments, faith communities where there is likely deep knowledge about who is in the community).

Hint: Economic/development organizations and local business associations such as the Chamber of Commerce should know the immigrant-owned businesses but usually don't. They should be on the target list to educate about the contributions of immigrant-owned businesses.

3

Get to know some of these business owners and recruit them to tell their stories.

Hint: This can be a difficult process if you do not already have a trusting relationship with them. You may be viewed with suspicion because immigrant business owners are often culturally unfamiliar with being spokespeople. They may regard questions about their businesses as unwarranted intrusion. They are also likely to be working very long hours thus making it difficult to divert their attention. It helps to bring a trusted person from their community who can explain the purpose and intention of your request, and why it is important.

Hint: Do further work with the immigrant-owned businesses that you think reflect the characteristics and traits likely to resonate positively with members of your community. These may vary according to orientation of community members (business, education, faith-based, etc.). Which groups do you most want to influence?

Hint: Plan how to collect information to get their stories. Is it by interview or to plan an in-person event and/or develop a written document? Do you have local expertise to do a video interview? Video interviews have the advantage of being used in many venues. Some key information to gather includes:

- Where are they from?
- Why did they come to the U.S.?
- How long were they here before they started their business?
- What is the service or product they offer?
- How did they learn about this business? In their native countries or in the U.S.?
- How long have they been in business?
- How many people work in their business?
- What difficulties did they face?
- What are their dreams for the future?

4

Whenever possible, incorporate these stories into community activities and venues. For example, advocate for expansion of business award categories to include an immigrant-owned business; incorporate into high school career awareness or worked-related events; have a weekly/monthly spotlight on an immigrant-owned business in local media, community/business e-letters or your own newsletters or website **or connect to legislative events for local officials, state and Congressional Representatives and Senators.**

5

Always compare and highlight percent of immigrant-owned businesses to the immigrant percent of population, e.g., immigrants own and operate 40 percent of the restaurants in our community but are only 14 percent of our community's population. This highlights their entrepreneurial spirit!

6

Emphasize that immigrant businesses bring know-how about doing business in other countries. International business is a growing part of business through out the U.S.

Immigrant Workers: Many of these same concepts and ideas can be applied with immigrant workers. Health care is always a strong place to start because health is everywhere and for everyone and the need is growing rapidly. Check with your public health department, hospitals and community health centers to see who is staffing these organizations. It is likely you will find a high percentage of immigrants filling positions at both the high- and low-skilled ends of health care professions for which the native-born are either unqualified or unwilling to do. Culturally competent care is also a hugely important asset brought by immigrant health care workers.

Look for dramatic numbers and gather stories from these immigrant workers. The ILC study "[Immigrant Workers in the Massachusetts Health Care Industry](#)" has many examples of how to do this. Local media, business, workforce and community organizations may be interested in highlighting the statistics and stories especially in areas where health care plays a large economic role.